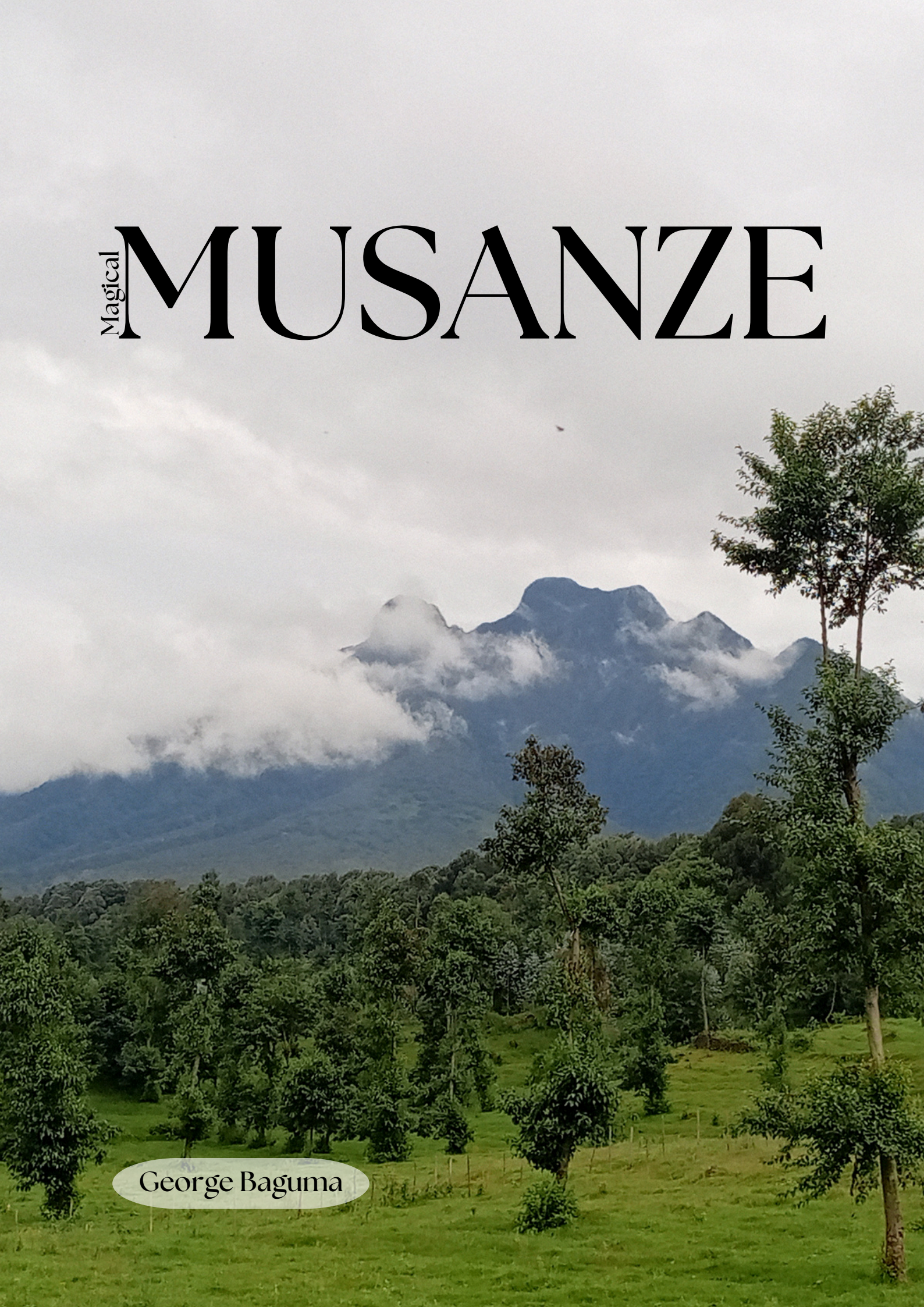




Magical MUSANZE

George Baguma

“

Life is either a daring adventure or nothing at all.”

Helen Keller

MUSANZE



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En Route to Musanze



I left Kigali at 9 a.m. After a quick coffee break at Café Inganji, I twisted the throttle all the way to Musanze. This ride unfolded like a moving postcard—northern Rwanda’s landscapes stretching out in vibrant layers of green.

Through the Rulindo stretch, I found myself captivated by the meandering Nyabarongo River glinting below and the rolling hills of Kamonyi and Muhanga rising gracefully on the opposite side of the valley. In Gakenke, the sharp bends demanded focus, but even then, the sight of Mount Kabuye and Mount Mbwe drew my eyes toward the horizon.

As Musanze drew closer, the silhouettes of the volcanoes emerged—majestic, commanding, and imposing. When I made my way to Mukungwa River, I felt the quiet thrill of arrival. The much-anticipated tour was finally about to begin.

Mukungwa River



Before crossing Mukungwa River, I pulled over. Then I decided to trace the river upstream, curious to find its source. After a short break at the Mpenge Falls viewpoint, I proceeded to the Mukungwa Hydropower Plant. Beyond it, the river disappeared – no stream, no surface water. Could its source be hidden inside the plant? Something didn't add up.

What I found out next was simply fascinating. Mukungwa flows from Lake Ruhondo, but the stretch between the lake and the plant now runs underground. It used to flow freely across the land until engineers rerouted it for the hydropower project. Was it necessary? That, my friend, is a mystery for another day.

From the plant, I rode to Lake Ruhondo to see the point where the river slipped beneath the ground. Standing there, I couldn't help but marvel at the hidden path connecting nature and human ingenuity.

Mpenge Falls



While following Mukungwa River, I spotted a smaller tributary: Mpenge River. Curiosity led me closer, and there it was — a waterfall, cascading gracefully into a crystal-clear pool below. Sunlight danced on the mist, scattering tiny rainbows across the rocks. The sound of rushing water was hypnotic, blending with distant bird calls and the rustle of leaves — a symphony of nature that made the world feel perfectly still.

Standing there, I felt an overwhelming sense of calm, as if time itself had paused to let the river breathe. The cool breeze carried the scent of wet earth and moss, wrapping the place in a kind of purity only nature can create. A few locals appeared on the opposite bank, filling their jerrycans and exchanging pleasantries — a reminder that this serenity is not just scenic beauty but also a living source, sustaining the community around it.

That's the beauty of Musanze. You set out to explore one attraction, only for another to quietly steal the show. Every trail here seems to hold its own secret, each moment a gentle reminder that sometimes the most memorable discoveries are the ones you never planned to find.

Lake Ruhondo



From the southern tip of Lake Ruhondo, I rode along the shoreline toward the Gashaki Peninsula. At some point, rain began to fall, turning the trail muddy and slippery—testing my riding skills. The shifting weather dimmed visibility and veiled the lake and the volcanoes that had moments earlier painted such a picturesque scene.

Later in the evening, I checked into My Hill Ecolodge. In the morning, I woke up to an awe-inspiring sight: all five volcanoes straddling Rwanda’s northwestern border stood before me in their full glory. It was a view worth every mile of the journey. After breakfast, I indulged in a boat ride across the lake, making several stopovers on the small, tranquil islands scattered across the water.

As I explored the lake, curiosity led me to wonder which river feeds it. I soon learned that Lake Ruhondo was once nourished by Ntaruka River—but that river no longer exists. My host explained that it was diverted during the construction of the Ntaruka Hydropower Plant. Today, a pipeline channels water from Lake Burera, sustaining both the flow and the generation of electricity—an impressive feat of engineering blending nature and innovation.

I was tempted to explore Lake Burera, but this tour was all about Musanze. Crossing over would mean stepping into another district—an adventure best saved for another day.

Mount Bisoke



After exploring the calm waters of Lake Ruhondo, I rode to downtown Musanze for a couple of meetings before heading to Kinigi. Later in the evening, I checked into The Peakspot Lodge, a cozy spot framed by misty mountain silhouettes that hinted at the adventure ahead.

At sunrise, I made my way to Volcanoes National Park's headquarters and joined a group of fellow hikers bound for Mount Bisoke. Our guide gave a quick briefing, and we set off into the wild. This tour took place during the rainy season. As a result, it was slippery up there. Mud splashed, boots sank, and the forest seemed to breathe around us.

Three grueling hours later, we reached the summit — and there it was: Bisoke Crater Lake, floating in the mist like a secret from another world. We spent an hour on the rim, sharing snacks and refreshments. It felt like a picnic in the sky.

The descent was just as testing, steep and slick, but that's part of Bisoke's charm — it pushes, humbles, and rewards you in equal measure.

Musanze Caves



One day after I conquered Bisoke, I descended into another world — the Musanze Caves. Before entering, I was handed a helmet with a headlight, gloves, and a facemask — standard gear for what felt more like an expedition than a mere stroll.

Led by a guide, I stepped into the tunnel, its cool breath rising from the depths. The beam from my headlight sliced through the darkness, revealing walls sculpted by ancient fire. This was no ordinary cave — it was a masterpiece of volcanic creation.

Centuries ago, molten lava from the Virunga eruptions carved these vast underground chambers, leaving behind a labyrinth of rocky corridors beneath the hills of Musanze. Today, a paved path and hand-carved stairs make exploration possible — but the mystery remains untouched.

Down there, surrounded by silence and rocky walls, I felt the pulse of the earth itself — timeless, powerful, and mysterious.

Agati Library



After touring the caves, I made a brief stop at Agati Library — a quiet, creative space nestled in the affluent Mukizungu neighborhood. My visit was short; I had only come to deliver a few copies of *Memories*, a book chronicling my travels across Rwanda between 2017 and 2020.

Agati Library, founded in 2018 by six young Rwandans, is on a mission to put books into the hands of every child and youth across the country. This establishment provides learning sanctuaries beyond the classroom, nurturing curiosity, creativity, and a love for reading. From its first space in Musanze, Agati has grown to seven locations nationwide, powered by passionate young volunteers.

Stepping inside, I felt the thrill any reading enthusiast knows—the quiet promise of stories waiting to be discovered. Most of the books here are for children, but that is exactly where the magic lies: planting curiosity early, helping young minds appreciate the beauty of their country, and sparking a love for exploration.

Though the children were at school, a couple of co-founders showed up to receive the donations. It was a short visit, but a meaningful one—a small contribution to a movement shaping young minds across Rwanda.

Ellen DeGeneres Campus



After leaving Agati Library, I headed to the Ellen DeGeneres Campus of the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund in Kinigi, on the road to Volcanoes National Park. My itinerary had been anything but fixed — I didn't know how long I'd stay in Musanze or how far I'd go. Meeting stakeholders and receiving their swift support along the way allowed me to explore far more than I had planned. As noted on page 18, local businesses sponsored this journey, turning ideas into experiences.

The campus is a living testament to Rwanda's conservation story. At the Conservation Gallery, I learned about Dian Fossey's groundbreaking work, the mountain gorillas' near-extinction, recovery, and the crucial role local communities play in protecting them. I explored research labs, strolled along trails showcasing native ecosystems, and engaged with programs that celebrate Rwanda's conservation successes.

It was an inspiring visit — a place where the harmony between people and wildlife is both studied and celebrated, reminding me that protecting nature is a shared responsibility.

Jungle Woodwork



After a day at the Ellen DeGeneres Campus, I returned to town inspired and quietly reflective about the balance between people and nature.

The next morning, I woke up without a plan. I first rode to The Peakspot Lodge to pick up something I had forgotten. That simple errand turned into an unexpected adventure when I noticed the rocky path continued deeper into the forest.

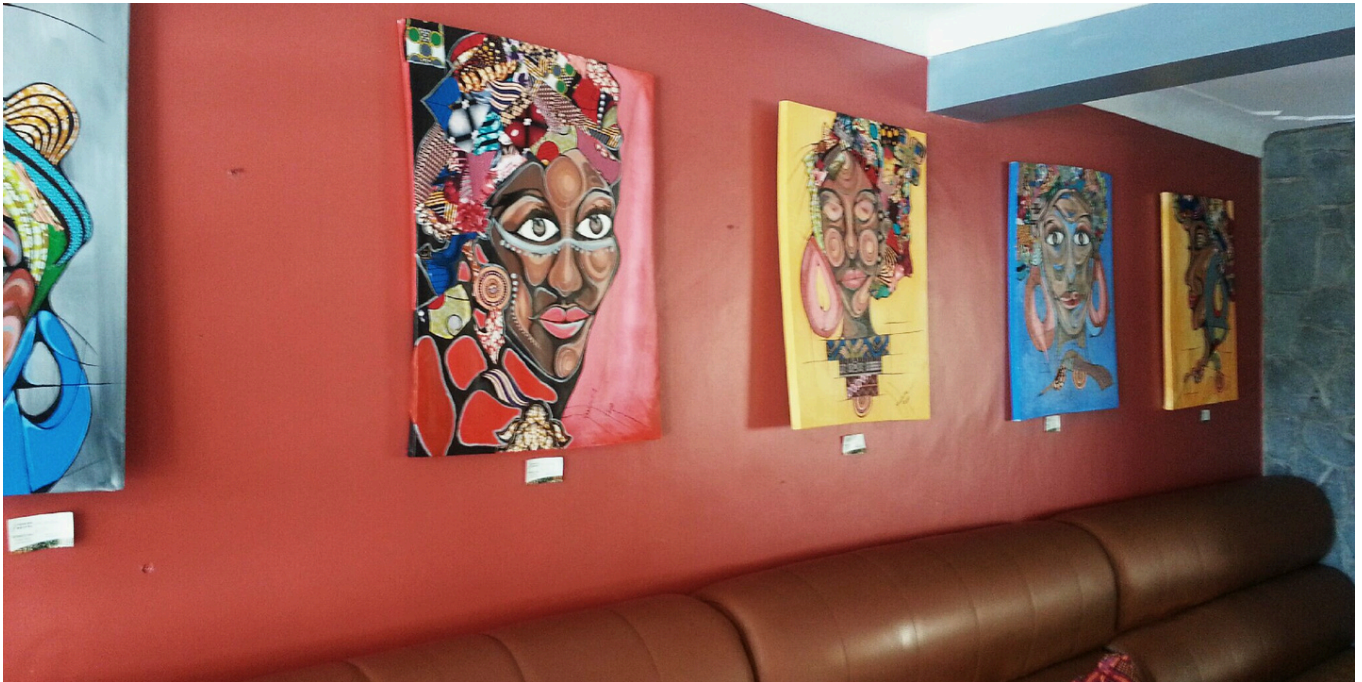
Curiosity led me along the narrow trail through lush greenery until I came upon a group of men cutting logs and sawing them into finely crafted timber. They welcomed me into their jungle workshop, showing me the rhythm and patience behind each piece.

As I worked alongside them, I felt the textures of the wood, smelled the earthy forest air, and heard the harmonious sounds of saws and axes mingling with birdsong. It was more than a lesson in craftsmanship; it was a glimpse into the daily life of a community rooted in the forest, where every action is intertwined with nature.

What began as a simple detour became a lesson in patience, humility, and the quiet beauty of life in the local community—a reminder that the most memorable moments often come when you wander off the main path.

By the time I returned to town, I carried with me more than a new skill; A deeper sense of connection to the land and the people who shape it.

Paintings on the Wall



After trying my hand at crafting timber in the jungle, I returned to Migano Hotel for a meeting with a local investor — someone who would later become one of the sponsors of this tour. Once the meeting was over, I spent a quiet moment in the restaurant, organizing notes and sorting through the photos I'd taken along the way. I take a lot of pictures during my tours — far more than I'll ever use — and most end up in the trash bin.

When I put down my devices and looked around, something caught my eye. The paintings on the wall — portraits of elegant women in vibrant African attire and beaded accessories — seemed to draw me in. Each canvas had a business card pinned beneath it, revealing the name of the artist behind these captivating works: Ndangiza Fahad.

Curiosity got the better of me, and shortly thereafter, I was chatting with Fahad on WhatsApp. Our conversation led to an unexpected invitation to his hotel — Ndaza Escape. Without thinking twice, I fired up my bike and rode back toward Kinigi. The back-and-forth rides between Muhoza and Kinigi sectors became frequent — and to be honest, they were simply exhilarating. That route is every biker's paradise.

Africa Rising Cycling Center



After leaving Ndaza Escape, I visited the neighboring Africa Rising Cycling Center (ARCC). The day before, I had emailed management requesting access, but no response had come my way. When I showed up in person, it took just five minutes for my request to be approved.

A staff member guided me around the fully equipped academy, showing the hostels, dining hall, gym, and other facilities. He explained the process of developing world-class cyclists — from training programs and nutrition to the discipline required to excel. Later, in the garage, I learned a few technical aspects of racing bicycles.

With handlebars lower than the saddle, the racing bicycles force riders into an aerodynamic, leaning posture for speed. Mountain bicycles, in contrast, focus on shock absorption and traction, built to navigate rugged terrain. Observing the cyclists training on the road, it was clear: ARCC combines science, discipline, and effort to shape athletes capable of competing on the world stage.

Red Rocks Cultural Center



As my tour approached its end, I realized I hadn't visited any cultural center. Initially, was torn between Gorilla Guardians Village and Red Rocks Cultural Center. I chose the latter for two reasons: I had been to Gorilla Guardians before, and I had ridden to Kinigi many times during this tour. Red Rocks, on the other hand, was in a part of Musanze I barely knew.



I spent two full days at Red Rocks immersed in Rwanda's rich heritage. From brewing banana wine and performing traditional dances to basket weaving and pottery, every activity offered a hands-on experience that was both engaging and enlightening. Each moment felt like stepping into the rhythm of the authentic Rwandan ways of doing things.



My stay was a true celebration of Rwandan culture — a vibrant tapestry of artistry, heritage, and learning. When I finally left, I took with me not just souvenirs and photos, but an intimate understanding of the creativity, skill, and resilience that make this destination truly remarkable.



Acknowledgements

This booklet would not have been possible without the generous support of several key stakeholders who made my Musanze tour both comfortable and memorable. From offering accommodation and meals to providing financial support, their contributions went far beyond mere logistics.

What impressed me most was not just their willingness to help, but the speed and responsiveness with which they embraced my proposals – often on very short notice. Their support allowed me to focus fully on exploring, documenting, and experiencing Musanze in a way that brought this publication to life.

To all of you, I extend my heartfelt gratitude. Your generosity, professionalism, and belief in this project were invaluable, and this booklet is as much a reflection of your support as it is of my journey.

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